

“HERE’S MY STOCKING. WHERE’S YOURS?”



The Value of a Man!

“How much then is a man better than a sheep?” The Great Teacher is expressing his conception of a man’s value. The Pharisees, offended because his disciples “were an hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat” on the sabbath day, were bold in their condemnation of Jesus. “Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day,” they say. The answer, a complete refutation of the charge, was: David “did eat the shew bread,” also “the priests in the temple profane the sabbath”—both are blameless. They are but doing the necessary work, they are but carrying out the commands of one greater, than the temple; greater than the sabbath day. The sharp edge of the defense is seen in this sentence: “But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.”

His critics, silenced for a time, withdraw. But not for long. Going into the synagogue, he found a man having a withered hand. His enemies, that they might again accuse him, ask: “Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?” These words call forth one of the matchless parables of Jesus: “What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.” The Great Teacher then heals the man with a withered hand, whereupon the Pharisees go out and hold a council against him, “how they might destroy him.” There are several fundamental ideas clearly, and for all the sabbath day, more valuable than any law even that of keeping the sabbath day. The sheep, and cattle upon the hills are of value. That is not denied; the observance of the law is not to be despised; even the inanimate things, such as silver and gold, are not without value. But the value of all these is not to be compared with the value of a man. One little child, playing around the cottage door on a grape-laden hill in Judea is bigger, better, of more value than all the sheep in all the pastures of Palestine. One humble woman, engaged in sweeping the house in the city of Jerusalem is of more value than the temple sitting on the hill nearby. One man, however lowly, a member of the throng journeying up to the temple on a feast day is bigger, more valuable, than the temple, the roof of which gleams in the rays of the morning sun.

Through the ages succeeding the day in which Jesus spoke, down to the very present, the mistake civilization has made, is now making, is in placing the emphasis upon the thing, rather than the man; upon property rather than upon humanity. The need is just as insistent, just as necessary today as ever it was that we come to the view of the Great Teacher, if we would build a great civilization, and one that will endure. I am sure of another fact, also: The churches, welfare workers, philanthropists and all others engaged in the regeneration of the world need to remind themselves again and again that a man is better than a sheep; that mercy and not sacrifice is God’s first desire, that things are mere things, but men are immortal.

If I am correct in my judgment, the present civilization safeguards its pigs more carefully than it does its children. The cattle has a stricter supervision than have the children. The government is more solicitous about the sick hogs than it is about the sick children. The hogs and sheep and cattle have value—no one denies that; but they are of little value when compared to the value of the children—the boys and girls. Property values are real, but are not to be compared with the value of our men and our women.

In the enforcement of the law, our civilization again shows its weakness in that the thing is emphasized. A man who steals a pig is more certain of just punishment than the man who steals a child. The thief who steals a sack of corn is more in danger of just punishment than the man who steals a child. The man who sticks a knife in the back of a man is more in danger of just punishment than the man who sticks a knife in the back of a man.

Our civilization is weakest. The State is awakening to the fact that the value of a child is more than that of a pig. The State is revealing in the building of schools; the regulations governing child labor, the general attitude of mind which the public is coming to hold towards the children, the men and the women—humanity. But it is yet a far, journey, a thorny way, an uphill climb that lies before us. We value our boys and girls, but our valuation is far too low. We are committed to the theory that a man is better than a sheep, but the theory needs to become more definitely a fact. Our people voted out the whiskey traffic because they are beginning to value our boys as being richer treasure than the revenue. We must now go further and suppress blind tigers for the very same reason—our boys are of more value than our business. We must suppress places of vice, dens of iniquity for the reason that we have lost all sight of revenue in the larger vision which has come to us, enabling us to correctly value our boys and girls. One boy, however humble may have been his birth, is of more value than all the revenue that the whisky traffic, legal or illegal, could ever bring to us. One girl, however humble her birth, however lowly her surroundings, is of more value to a community than all the rentals that come from a red light district. A few years ago there were men who argued: “Let us license houses of ill fame. Let us control a necessary evil.” I do not believe there are any now who would thus view the question. I am certain of this fact: If there is a man with a vision so distorted, he never yet grasped the significance of the words of the Great Teacher, “How much then is a man better than a sheep?” I believe we are upon the threshold of a new day, a better, bigger day. I believe that we are beginning to correctly estimate the value of a man. When we do, the legal and illicit liquor traffic will go, as will the licensed houses of infamy. Along with them will go that handmaid of Vice, Ignorance, for everywhere the school house will lift its head and the worthless parent, indifferent to the future of his own offspring, will be forced to give the child he has begotten a square deal. More and more our civilization is coming to the view that the parent who will not, or cannot give his child at least a fair show, has committed a crime in becoming a parent, and, in so far as it is possible, the State must step in and force the unworthy brutal parent to give his offspring a chance. That chance, without education, is sadly impaired. Hence the State is coming more and more to the idea of compulsory education. A man who will not educate his child, committed a crime by becoming a father; the State commits another when it allows the father to withhold the opportunities for education. More and more our people are coming to see these things, in spite of the selfish demagogue and spieler to the galleries; in spite of the selfish greed of mammon worship; in spite of men and devils. A new day is dawning, albeit one cannot see more than the first feeble rays of the ascending sun. And mark my words: The new word in the harmony of an advancing civilization is going to be “work.” Civilization has perished heretofore because when a nation reached a high degree of attainment they became a nation of idlers. A nation of idlers means a nation hell bent; indeed they will raise hell before they reach the world of despair. They will become the prey of vice and folly more exquisitely thought out than a nation of poverty stricken, ignorant and superstitious people could ever invent or create.

It used to be an idea that education was the sure road to an easy life; that the educated man was too refined to work, certainly too refined to do any kind of physical labor. That day has passed, thank God! More and more there is being injected into our educational system the gospel of work. Better a nation of ditch diggers than a nation of educated idlers; better a country imbued with the faith that honest labor is a crown of glory to any man than a nation of fops and fools tipping lightly along dressed in the latest fashion and groomed perfectly, yet with nothing to do. The nation has more to fear from its idle rich men than from all the safe-crackers yet to be born. It has more to fear from the follies of its idle rich women than from all the fallen women in all the red light districts in its bounds. Our education must emphasize the worker, not the garb a man wears, not the figure he cuts upon a ball room floor. Society dandies, no matter how beautifully they dance, nor how exquisitely they are groomed, are not worth a tinker’s dam to a State. It is the worker who counts—the ditch digger, the plowman, the worker in the mill, the toiler in the store, the hard-working housewife—these are the people who count in this world. The people who can and who do work—they are the real builders of our nation, and they will prove to be the real defenders of the nation in the day of stress.

These ideas are ideas that go hand in hand with the teaching of Jesus in his valuation of a man. He says: “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” He says: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Jesus Christ is the best friend the working man ever had. He is the one teacher who first injected into education the gospel of work. It is not an accident that he was the son of a carpenter nor that he was himself a carpenter. It is not an accident that his disciples were fishermen. Man worked before the fall, in the garden of Eden. After the fall he had to work with the penalty of tears and sweat added thereto. Slowly and surely, under the new awakening to the gospel of work, the world is climbing to its first blessed estate—work, but work that does not burden; activities, but activities that do not crush. The sweat and tears are gradually being eliminated. But work—never! Even in the world to come we must work. There will be no idlers in heaven. Else, why the statement: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; they rest from their labors, but their works do follow them.” Anyway, I am sure that this world does not need, nor will the future tolerate the trifter, the tramp. Their “occupations” are fast passing.